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AUTHOR Hammerman, Donald R.
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ABSTRACT

During the past 50 years, outdoor education as a curriculum development has progressed from a few pilot projects to some fairly comprehensive programs in the United States and Canada. In the process, outdoor education programs have lost the relaxed pace of earlier programs, flexibility in planning and scheduling, and total involvement of the classroom teacher. They have gained funds for exploration, new curriculum materials, and diversity. Outdoor educators should: (1) attempt to link outdoor learning experiences to life goals and interests; (2) explore non-reading alternatives as modes of learning; (3) develop programs geared to older populations; and (4) develop creative teaching methods. (CM)

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# JOURNEYING THROUGH THE 20th CENTURY WITH OUTDOOR EDUCATION

Remarks Delivered to The New State Outdoor Education Association
Swan Lake, N.Y.
Oct. 12, 1980

Donald R. Hammerman, Professor
Northern Illinois University

"New Frontiers in Outdoor Education for the 80's," is a most appropriate theme for this conference because, from its inception, outdoor education has been perceived as a new frontier of curriculum development. Now we're about to enter the last fifth of the 20th century. Outdoor education is a curriculum development that has progressed from a few isolated pilot projects to some fairly comprehensive programs, well entrenched, in many public school systems throughout the United States and Canada. The fact that this has occurred mainly during the last 50 years provides us with a golden opportunity to reflect for a bit on this educational phenomena and assess some of the trends before gazing into our crystal ball and looking ahead.

The early stages of resident outdoor education were characterized by a sense of community. Outdoor education, in its infancy, was typified by a holistic approach to learning. Ordinarily there was a time to rise, three meals a day, and a time to go to bed. What happened inbetween was planned cooperatively by children and teachers. Today there is a trend toward fragmentation. Some programs have a series of short class periods with a strong subjectmatter emphasis -- just like in school. The only thing missing is the ringing bell to signal the end of each period. That's not all bad; nothing ever remains the same, but in the process of refining and upgrading programs, we may have refined the very essence of outdoor education out of the resident experience.

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Some resident experiences have been shortened to 2½ days. One has to seriously question just how much of a sense of community can be fostered in that brief time span. Some resident programs seem to be mostly a hodge-podge of unrelated activities with little connection to the school curriculum. We should be asking the basic question: Why are we doing what we are doing? Is there a connection between what children are experiencing in the outdoor education program and the on-going curriculum in school?

Another missing element in some resident programs today is the physical presence of the classroom teacher. Initially a class operated much as a family unit, with the teacher very much an integral part of the family. Some teachers today are more concerned with only being with their students from nine to three, of being relieved of any evening program involvement, of not sleeping with the kids, and so on.

What have we lost in outdoor education? Three things primarily: (1) the relaxed pace that characterized so many of the early programs, (2) flexible planning and scheduling, and (3) the total involvement of the classroom teacher. What have we gained? First, we've gained in terms of experimentation. Federal dollars under the aegis of Title III provided funds which fostered a great deal of exploration of new directions and new modes of operation. This experimentation led, in turn, to the production of loads of curriculum materials in the form of curriculum guides, teacher's manuals, and programming aids. Thirdly, we've gained in diversity, a sense of being willing to branch out into some new directions such as cultural journalism, urban studies and adventure education.

We're on the threshold of the 80's. What does this portend for outdoor education? We have the opportunity to play prophet -- I predict.

The only danger in playing prophet, however, is that one can so easily be proven wrong. Josh Billings used to say, "Don't lay any certain plans for the future, it's like planting toads and expecting toadstools."

As we journey toward the year 2000, we can anticipate startling technological advances which will have dramatic sociological implications on our lifestyles. Our typical work week will be around 30 hours. Not because we have to work 30 hours per week, but because physically and psychologically we need to be engaged in work. Electronic marvels and other machinery will perform much of the work now performed by a majority of the work force. Thus most of us will be members of what we presently refer to, somewhat enviously, as the leisure class.

Medical technology will continue to make startling strides. Even today we can repair damaged hearts, replace broken or worn out parts -- thus extending our life spans significantly. Thus we create a new, older leisure class. People in their 70's, 80's and even 90's with the vigor and the stamina to remain gainfully employed, or to engaged in purposeful and meaningful outdoor pursuits. There is a large audience of elders out there waiting to be tapped.

Where are we heading? Just as in orienteering, we follow different bearings from time to time, and that's all right, just so long as we don't lose sight of our final destination. First, we need to keep in mind that outdoor education has an interdisciplinary focus. It is not primarily science, or predominantly physical education, or solely social studies. Outdoor education provides the vehicle for drawing upon various disciplines and dealing with subjectmatter in a holistic fashion.

Second, we need to keep in mind that outdoor education is a socially dynamic process. We're in an era where concern for humanistic learning

prevails. This trend will continue, and outdoor education with its emphasis on informal social situations and sensitivity for others will continue to provide a laboratory for humanistic learning. Resident programs, in particular, provide the setting where children and teachers relate to one another on a different wave length than ordinarily occurs in school.

Thirdly, outdoor education provides the setting and the process to stretch oneself physically, intellectually and spiritually. Through outdoor experience we gain new insights and move in new directions. Even though historically, outdoor education has been connected very closely with schools and school programs, we must recognize that there are new and varied audiences, or special populations who can also benefit from experiential learning out of school.

What should we, as outdoor educators, be doing? We should search for ways to link outdoor learning experiences to life goals and interests; interests which extend beyond ones' formal schooling. We need to devote more time and attention to exploring non-reading alternatives as modes of learning. We hear of the sunrise to sunset semester. Schooling is starting earlier and continuing longer. We need to examine and develop new programs specifically geared to older populations. Educators with a futuristic perspective view themselves as teachers in the process of becoming. We need to maintain that perspective, one of having never quite arrived -- always journeying along the path to new endeavors and new growth. With this kind of attitude we cannot help but bring a certain amount of creativity and freshness to our teaching.

Arnold Brown, in the April '80 issue of The Futurist, discussed the great tidal wave of change that is terrifying many people who have depended upon institutions that are now crumbling. Brown maintains that old institutions frequently act only to impede the development of a new age

that has new people and new needs. Institutions are prone to resist change. Brown calls this, "the March of Dimes phenomeon," in which the achievement of the stated goals of the institution become secondary to the perpetuation of the institution. So, as we reflect upon the "good old days," from time to time, and what was good about them, we must also exercise great care that we do not close our eyes to what we should relinquish in order to break new ground.

A host of organizations have evolved over the years -- some old, some new: the American Camping Association, the Council on Outdoor Education, The Association for Environmental Education, the Association for Experiential Education, etc. Do these organizations, which to some extent overlap and duplicate efforts, continue to serve real needs, or does the organization endure primarily to perpetuate itself? New structures and new systems do replace the old in our culture, and so it must be with outdoor education. It can never be the way it was. We can drag our heels and resist the inevitability of change, or we can welcome it as we welcome the new sunrise.

Finally, a few points to ponder:

-- Resident outdoor education isn't the way it used to be. Should it be?

-- Resident outdoor education centers are viewed by some as oases from urban reality. Do these utopian places provide a necessary interlude from the hectic day to day pace of urban life, or is this a form of dropping out -- an antequated and out-of-date approach to education in the modern world?

-- In a similar vein, are outdoor education programs interludes from schooling? Should they be, or should they be an integral part of the total schooling package?

-- What sort of learning environments exist out there in the real world, and how can using these environments help us to prepare for and cope with a future that we can only imagine?

-- What kinds of coping skills and talents will you need to take along with you in your own survival kit in order to survive the 80's and beyond?

-- Teaching is a risk taking venture. We hear a great deal about "teacher burnout" these days. How do we as educators find our own self-renewal?

-- Will outdoor education survive the 80's? Most certainly it will survive the 80's and beyond. Education out-of-doors provides opportunities for physical renewal through hiking, climbing, canoeing, skiing, etc. Physical renewal, where the body is totally engaged in the task at hand and the brain is operating on a different wave-length, is essential to intellectual and emotional renewal.

There are many different ways to learn and many different ways to teach. Extending the learning environment to instructional settings beyond the school encourages teachers to explore and experiment with different teaching strategies. This can only lead to a revitalization of the learning process. Outdoor learning environments provide the landscape-seascape where teachers can perform as artist and poet as well as technician.

What is an outdoor educator? We outdoor educators seem to be an interesting mix of idealist, romanticist and doers. Idealist, in the sense that we are concerned about what ought to be. We tend to ask questions like: How can I spark the learner? How can we improve upon the teaching-learning process? Romanticist, because basically, we are lovers. Lovers of natural beauty. Lovers of the peace and solitude that

only the great outdoors can provide. Doers, because we like to be on the move. Whether it be canoeing across a placid lake, gliding smoothly along on X-country skiis, stalking silently along a forest path with a pair of binoculars, or exploring the wilds of the urban environment--we tend to be doers.

What then is an outdoor educator? As outdoor educators we're curious about the world we life in. We're concerned about the welfare of others who share this common space. We recognize the educational potential that exists beyond the school and perceive the entire community, the world for that matter, as an instructional resources--one to be ventured into--experienced--thought about. We develop or acquire a sensitivity to the environment whether it be urban or rural. We've fine-tuned our senses so that we're aware of what is happening around us. We like to solve problems and we're challenged by questions like: What happened here? Why did this occur? What is likely to happen next? We tend to take a holistic view of things. We make connections between events, the cause of those events and the consequences.

Finally, an outdoor educator is simply a good teacher. But is every teacher an outdoor educator? Not necessarily -- but should they be? Idealistically, yes! The world should be our classroom, and we should be able to function just as effectively outside the school building as we do indoors. An outdoor educator is one who can lead a child to a pool of living knowledge, and cause him to want to drink.